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SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/PASCUAL

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [KISL](#) [IS](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: MINISTRY OF AWQAF HOPES SAUDIS WILL DISTRIBUTE
GAZA HAJJ VISAS THROUGH PA

Classified By: Acting Principal Officer Greg Marchese, per reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The PA Deputy Minister of Religious Affairs called for USG pressure on Saudi Arabia to distribute Hajj visas to Gazans through the Ministry rather than through HAMAS. Doing so would help the PA, he said. He added that the PA wants Gazans to depart through Jordan, not Egypt. The PA has already begun the selection process for Hajj visa recipients in the West Bank and Gaza, but HAMAS's competing list in Gaza could produce some friction, according to the Minister. End Summary.

PA MINISTRY DISTRIBUTING HAJJ VISAS,
HOPES TO DISTRIBUTE TO GAZANS

¶2. (C) Deputy Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs Salah Zuhayka told PolOff September 22 that Saudi Arabia offered 3000 Hajj visas for Palestinians from the West Bank and 1800 for Gazans. (Note. The Hajj begins o/a December 10. End Note.) He said the Ministry has already begun an Internet-based lottery to select the 3000 West Bankers and hopes to receive 2000 additional visas for West Bankers after Eid al-Fitr in early October. He said selection of visa recipients this year is being done by the Ministry, rather than an independent committee as previously.

¶3. (C) Zuhayka said the Ministry asked Saudi Arabia to distribute the 1800 visas to Gazans through the PA rather than HAMAS, but the Saudis have not responded. He said the PA and HAMAS are compiling separate lists of Gazans for visas, which could produce conflict when one group of people is denied visas in favor of the other. Zuhayka said USG pressure on Saudi Arabia to work with the Ministry of Awqaf would help the PA. He said the PA prefers to bring Gazans through Israel and the West Bank to Jordan for the Hajj, rather than through Egypt.

PALESTINIANS MAKING UMRA TRAVEL INDEPENDENTLY

¶4. (C) Zuhayka told PolOff that Saudi Arabia issues Umra visas on a rolling basis throughout the year and that Muslims, including Palestinians, can apply without the assistance of their governments. He said Gazans who make the Umra, therefore, are not necessarily identified with a particular faction. (Note: The Umra pilgrimage to Mecca can be performed at almost any time during the year, unlike the Hajj, which occurs annually in the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar. End Note.)
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